

Message Text

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AMEMBASSY MADRID

DIA WASHDC

USCINCSO J2 QUARRY HEIGHTS CZ

C O N F I D E N T I A L LA PAZ 5696

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PGOV, BL

SUBJECT: ELECTION AFTERMATH: TENSIONS MOUNT AS SILES ZUAZO

DECLARES HUNGER STRIKE

1. SUMMARY. EVENTS IN BOLIVIA TOOK A DRAMATIC TURN ON JULY 18 WHEN UDP PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE HERNAN SILES ZUAZO EMBARKED ON A HUNGER STRIKE TO PROTEST ALLEGED IRREGULARITIES IN THE RECENTLY CONCLUDED GENERAL ELECTIONS. SILES' GESTURE WAS PROMPTLY ENDORSED BY VICTOR PAZ ESTENSSORO, AND IT IS POSSIBLE THAT A RASH OF SYMPATHETIC HUNGER STRIKES WILL SOON BREAK OUT. IN A PARALLEL MOVE, THE THREE PRINCIPAL OPPOSITION FRONTS--UDP, MNR-PRA, AND PDC--FORMALLY PETITIONED THE NATIONAL ELCTORAL COURT TO ANNUL PORTIONS OF THE PEREDA VOTE IN EIGHT OF BOLIVIA'S NINE DEPARTMENTS. MEANWHILE, THE NATIONAL COURT SUSPENDED THE RIGHT OF THE DEPARTMENTAL COURTS TO DECLARE PROVISIONAL WINNERS IN THEIR AREAS AND PROMISED A COMPLETE SCRUTINY OF ALL RESULTS DURING THE COMING WEEK. IN A TELEVISED INTERVIEW, PRESIDENT BANZER DENIED ANY GOVERNMENT COMPLICITY IN THE

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ALLEGED FRAUD, WHILE, IN A LETTER TO THE OPPOSITION CANDIDATES, THE ARMED FORCES HIGH COMMAND REAFFIRMED THEIR COMMITMENT TO THE DEMOCRATIZATION PROCESS. END SUMMARY.

2. SILES ZUAZO PROVIDED A DRAMATIC DIMENSION TO THE ELCTORAL FRAUD ISSUE WHEN HE DECLARED HIMSELF ON AN INDEFINITE HUNGER STRIKE IN THE LATE AFTERNOON OF JULY 18. HOLDING FORTH FROM

THE OFFICES OF THE PAPAL NUNCIO--AND THUS VEILING HIMSELF IN DIPLOMATIC IMMUNITY AND TACIT CHURCH APPROVAL--SILES ISSUED A STATEMENT PETITIONING THE ARMED FORCES TO "COMPLY WITH THE POPULAR SOVEREIGN VINDICT OF THE BOLIVIAN PEOPLE." WHILE TERMING HIS ACTION A "PEACEFUL RESPONSE," SILES ENJOINED ALL OPPOSITION ELEMENTS TO MOBILIZE THEMSELVES ON THE BASIS OF THEIR "SITUATION, POSSIBILITIES, EXPERIENCE, AND METHODS OF STRUGGLE." SILES SAID THAT HIS HUNGER STRIKE WOULD CONTINUE UNTIL "THE ELECTORAL TRIUMPH OF THE OPPOSITION IS GUARANTEED." THE UDP COALITION PROMPTLY CABLED SILES' POSITION TO THE UN, THE OAS AND INTERNATIONAL GROUPS SUCH AS AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL AND WOLA.

3. THE SILES HUNGER STRIKE WAS PROMPTLY ENDORSED "WITHOUT RESERVATION" BY VICTOR PAZ ESTENSSORO AND HIS MNR-PRA COALITION. RENE BERNAL AND HIS PDC BACKERS, HOWEVER, HAVE THUS FAR BEEN SILENT. INFORMED ABOUT SILES' ACTION, ELECTORAL COURT PRESIDENT JULIO MANTILLA EXPRESSED HIS REGRET, ADDING THAT IF A SOLUTION COULD BE FOUND WITHIN THE COMPETENCE OF THE COURT, HE WOULD BE WILLING TO PURSUE IT.

4. THE BOLIVIAN PUBLIC HAS NOT YET REACTED TO THE SILES MOVE, BUT IT IS QUITE POSSIBLE THAT A NUMBER OF SYMPATHETIC HUNGER STRIKES COULD BREAK OUT SHORTLY. WHETHER THEY WILL MUSHROOM INTO THE SORT OF CHALLENGE PRESENTED TO THE GOVERNMENT BY THE DECEMBER-JANUARY HUNGER STRIKE FOR POLITICAL

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AMNESTY, HOWEVER, IS MORE DIFFICULT TO DETERMINE. MEANTIME, MINeworkERS HAVE DECLARED A 24 HOUR WORK STOPPAGE FOR JULY 21 TO BUTTRESS THEIR DEMANDS FOR A SALARY INCREASE AND TO PROTEST AGAINST ELECTORAL FRAUD. WE ALSO UNDERSTAND THAT STUDENTS PLAN TO PROTEST THE CLOSURE OF THE SAN ANDRES UNIVERSITY, AND PRESUMABLY ELECTORAL IRREGULARITIES AS WELL, IN A SERIES OF "LIGHTING" STREET MEETINGS JULY 19.

5. ON A RELATED NOTE, THE UDP, MNR-PRA COALITION, AND PDC FORMALLY REQUESTED THE NATIONAL ELECTORAL COURT TO ANNUL ALL VOTES "UNJUSTLY ATTRIBUTED" TO JUAN PEREDA'S UNP. THEIR COMPLAINT SPECIFICALLY ALLUDES TO THE PEREDA VOTE IN ALL DEPARTMENTS EXCEPT CHUQUISACA. THE THREE FRONTS CALLED ATTENTION TO:

--INSTANCES OF VOTER REGISTRATION IN EXCESS OF THE FIGURES PROJECTED BY THE 1976 CENSUS.

--THE APPEARANCE OF "PHANTOM VOTERS" IN CERTAIN AREAS.

--THE "LAST MINUTE" CREATION OF 359 POLLING PLACES.

--VIOLATION OF BALLOT BOXES BY "UNIFORMED ELEMENTS."

--STATEMENTS BY THE INTERNATIONAL OBSERVERS INVITED BY THE PERMANENT ASSEMBLY ON HUMAN RIGHTS TO THE EFFECT THAT THE ELECTIONS WERE A "SHAMELESS FRAUD."

6.

6. IN A CONCURRENT BUT APPARENTLY UNRELATED RELEASE, THE NATIONAL ELECTORAL COURT HAS SUPENDED THE RIGHT OF THE NINE DEPARTMENTAL COURTS TO DECLARE PROVISIONAL FINAL RETURNS IN THEIR AREAS. THE NATIONAL COURT DECLARED THAT THE DEFINITIVE RESULTS WOULD BE DISCLOSED ONLY AFTER A RIGOROUS SCRUTINY, WHICH IS SCHEDULED TO BEGIN NEXT WEEK.

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7. ALSO COMMANDING HEADLINES ON JULY 19 WERE PRESIDENT BANZER AND THE ARMED FORCES. IN A TELEVISION INTERVIEW AIRED THE PREVIOUS NIGHT, BANZER AFFIRMED THAT HIS GOVERNMENT HAD "NOTHING TO DO WITH (ELECTORAL) FRAUD...IF IN FACT (ANY) TOOK PLACE." (SIC) IN A PARALLEL MOVE, THE ARMED FORCES ISSUED THE TEXT OF AN OFFICIAL REPLY TO A LETTER CONCERNING ELECTORAL IRREGULARITIES FROM BERNAL, PAZ AND SILES. THE REPLY, SIGNED BY BANZER, CHIEF OF STAFF VICTOR GONZALES AND THE THREE SERVICE COMMANDERS, RECONFIRMS THE ARMED FORCES' PLEDGE TO GUARANTEE THE DEMOCRATIZATION PROCESS. WARNING AGAINST VIOLENT PROTESTS, IT CONTENDS THAT ALL POLITICAL GROUPS WERE INVOLVED IN IRREGULARITIES AND THAT THE MOUNTING RECRIMINATIONS ONLY "DISTORT REALITY" AND "DIMINISH THE VALIDITY" OF THE PROCESS.

8. COMMENT: BY DECLARING A HUNGER STRIKE, SILES IS PLAYING HIS TRUMP CARD, AND IT MAY BE AN ACE. THE GOVERNMENT CANNOT VIOLATE THE NUNCIATURE AND THROW HIM INTO EXILE, AND WILL FIND IT DIFFICULT TO DEAL WITH SYMPATHETIC HUNGER STRIKERS ON NATIONAL TURF. AT THE SAME TIME, CONCESSIONS WILL BE DIFFICULT. SILES IS NOT LIKELY TO BE SATISFIED BY ANYTHING SHORT OF A RECOUNT WHICH SHOWS THE OPPOSITION FORCES WITH A POPULAR AND CONGRESSIONAL MAJORITY OR NULLIFICATION OF THE ENTIRE ELCTIONS. THE BEST HOPE TO SAVE THE ELCTIONS NOW WOULD APPEAR TO BE A FAST DEAL BETWEEN PEREDA AND PAZ AND/OR BERNAL. WHILE THIS MIGHT NOT GET SILES EATING AGAIN, IT WOULD CERTAINLY WEAKEN HIS MORAL ARGUMENT AND PERHAPS GIVE BOLIVIA A SURVIVABLE GOVERNMENT. COALITION TALKS REMAIN VERY MUCH IN THE PRELIMINARY STAGES, HOWEVER, AND IT IS TOO EARLY TO BE OPTIMISTIC ABOUT THEIR PROSPECTS.
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